MEMORANDUM DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR Dec. 3 1978

To: Mr. Ashley Hewitt, Director, ARA/CAR, Department of State

From: Ambassador Max V. Krebs (retired)

Subject: Contacts with the People's Temple During my Tenure in Guyana (March 1974 to June 1976)

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I cannot recall when I first became aware of the People's Temple project in Guyana, but it must have been fairly soon after my arrival. There were actually two rather similar agricultural projects getting under way during 1974, both located on large tracts of land (over 1000 acres) situated on the northwest side of the highway linking Matthews Ridge and Port Kaituma. Both tracts had been obtained reportedly on long-term leaseholds (for nominal or no fees) from the Government of Guyana. The sponsors proposed to clear the jungle and engage in large-scale agricultural production, an activity which coincided with the Guyanese authorities' objective of making the country self-sufficient in food, clothing and shelter.

There was a stark contrast in the initial reports reaching me about the two projects, both incidentally completely American in personnel and financing. Both our own officers (including at least two who had visited the projects) and Guyanese familiar with that isolated region (accessible from the capital only by small aircraft or coastal steamers), were of the opinion that the People's Temple (PT) project was well-organized, well-financed and making substantial progress. The other project, which I believe was called "Shalom", was reported to be in serious financial difficulties, if not bankrupt, with little accomplished in the way of clearing and cultivating its tract, and with a steady stream of defectors from its original complement of around 20-30 remnants of the 1960's hippie movement. At least one of the women who decided to return to the U.S. had to be assisted financially through the good offices of the consular section. There were also vague intimations that the Guyanese suspected the promoters of the project were really (or hoped to be) engaged in the cultivation of marijuana. By mid-1975 the entire "Shalom" project was defunct. The PT project never suffered from these problems or suspicions; in fact its image among Guyanese and Americans alike in Guyana was enhanced by contrast.

The PT organization in Guyana at that time (1974 and early 1975) consisted of an administrative headquarters in Georgetown, a field support (or rest) house in Port Kaituma, and a work camp at the project site. Its total personnel in Guyana never to my knowledge exceeded 100 people up to the time of my departure in mid-1976. It also owned a second-hand shrimp trawler, the MS CUDJOE, which was being used during that period to bring supplies and equipment into Port Kaituma destined for the project site; it plied between Port Kaituma and Georgetown, Port of Spain (Trinidad) and Florida and Gulf Coast ports in the U.S.

The PT people maintained contact with the Embassy, but the contacts were irregular and principally with the consular section. When I learned that there were a number of women in the Georgetown headquarters, I passed the word to Mrs. Krebs and she and Mrs. Matthews (Wife of Wade Matthews, Deputy Chief of Mission) saw to it that the PT ladies were invited to attend meetings and other activities of the American Women's Group. Mrs. Paula Adams and Miss Debbie Touchette subsequently took some part in AWG activities; they were the only more or less "regulars".

One controversial incident occurred, I believe, in the summer of 1974

during one of the Reverend Mr. Jimmie Jones' infrequent visits to Guyana. One of his objectives during this visit was to dispel any questions or doubts which might lurk in the minds of the largely church-affiliated Guyanese public concerning the PT, its origins, religious philosophy and mission in Guyana. To do this Jones proposed to hold a public meeting, heralded by advance publicity via radio, leaflets and pulpit announcements in as many Guyanese churches as would cooperate. Jones' representatives in Georgetown persuaded the Roman Catholic authorities to allow them to use the Sacred Heart Church, located in the center of Georgetown directly across Main Street from the American Embassy chancery. Without advance notice of any kind, I was informed later (I was out of the country during Jones' visit), Jones introduced the subject of faith healing into his talk at the meeting about the PT, parading before the assemblage persons allegedly cured of normally fatal diseases through the "laying on" of hands.

This episode left a sour taste not only among the Catholic hierarchy and communicants but also in the Protestant community. Still, after a cooling-off period and vigorous efforts by the PT to reassure their religious confreres, the PT was accepted in 1975 as a member church of the Guyana Council of Churches, representing virtually all the Protestant denominations. I have been told since leaving Guyana (1978) by the Reverend Mr. Paul Tidemann, an American Lutheran missionary and Secretary (1976-78) of the Board of Directors of the Council of Churches, that the PT was active in the Council mainly in building public confidence and support for itself. To this end, inter alia, it contributed US$2,000 each to the work of the Council and to a Seminary being launched by the Council, and a further large sum to the fund for restoration of the Episcopal cathedral. PT participation dropped off in 1977 after Jones came to Guyana and the PT absented itself completely during the Council's very difficult wrestling with the constitutional referendum issue in 1977-78, which the Council openly opposed.

Beginning in the fall of 1974 I made discreet overtures through intermediaries to the effect that I was interested in learning more about the PT and that I hoped one day to visit the project site. As a result of these feelers, arrangements were made for a delegation of the PT to call on me in my office. The call took place on Thursday, January 23, 1975. The delegation consisted of Messrs. Gene Chaikin and John Brown and Mmes. Paula Adams and Karen Layton. They spent most of an hour with me. They described in some detail what Jones and the PT hoped to accomplish in Guyana, the progress achieved up to that point, and the expected total investment in both people and equipment. They were forthcoming in answering my questions about the mother church in California and about the practice of faith healing (I told them in a friendly way that I was aware of negative reactions among Guyanese to this aspect of their practices growing out of the episode at Sacred Heart Church). I also told them I would probably be making a trip soon to Matthews Ridge and the nearby region and would like very much to visit the project. They assured me I would be welcome and we agreed I would give them advance notice via their Georgetown office.

The trip to Matthews Ridge materialized on March 13, 1975, at the invitation of the Chief Veterinarian of the Government of Guyana, Dr. Peter

Fernandes, who had several livestock development projects in that area in which I had also expressed an interest. Dr. Fernandes arranged passage to Matthews Ridge in a Guyanese Air Force 10-passenger aircraft. Also in the party were Mrs. Jane Fernandes (an American and our Embassy nurse), their two children (pre-school) and Mr. and Mrs. Milton Low (owner of a ship building and repair yard and neighbors and close friends of the Fernandes). From the airstrip at Matthews Ridge we travelled in Land Rovers belonging to the Ministry of Agriculture. We visited briefly two or three livestock and other agricultural projects along the road from Matthews Ridge to Port Kaituma. When we came to the entrance to the PT project, about 5 miles from Port Kaituma, at around 10:00 a.m., we were met, as pre-arranged, by a wheeled tractor hauling a high-bed wagon from the PT project.

I should explain that at that stage (probably about 9 months from the inauguration of the project), the principal activity was still clearing the jungle. So far, a strip about 50 yards wide had been cleared to a depth of some 6 miles, and at that distance work had commenced on clearing the tracts which would be used for the village and for cultivation, with several hundred acres in various stages of clearing and perhaps 25 acres actually planted, mostly on an experimental basis. The access road was little more than a couple of muddy ruts through the cleared strip, with at least one stream crossed by a sort of makeshift log causeway. We had been advised that the road was impassable even for four-wheel-drive vehicles (it was then the end of the rainy season), and it soon became apparent that the advice was accurate. We jolted along at a snail's pace; it began to rain and we huddled under sheets of plastic as best we could; we cheered when our caravan by a narrow-squeak made it safely over the makeshift causeway; we stopped to chat briefly with a sodden group of some 20-25 Guyanese hired workers engaged in planting a cover crop in the just-cleared part of the strip and later to shake hands with a couple of young men of the PT operating bulldozers. Altogether it took us 45 minutes to traverse those 6 miles!

At the camp site we were greeted by the resident supervisor, a man somewhat past middle age whose name I cannot recall, and by what I took to be most of the contingent living and working there. I recall about 15-20 people, all male, mostly in their 20's, with at least one apparently still in his teens (son of the resident supervisor). The men were mostly white but there was more than a token sprinkling of blacks. We were received very cordially, especially Dr. Fernandes who had been advising them regarding their proposed entry into livestock rearing. We were shown around the two buildings men constructed, very primitive combination dormitory-kitchen-storage structures, and the comparatively sumptuous roofed cage in which was housed a chimpanzee (or some other kind of primate), reportedly rescued from an unkind fate with a circus or zoo in California and brought to Guyana.

The atmosphere was quite relaxed and informal. We talked freely with several of the "pioneers" about their living conditions (uncomfortable), work (tough), aspirations (high), etc. My impression was of a highly motivated, mainly self-disciplined group, and of an operation which had a good chance of at least initial success. We wandered around looking at the planted plots and the little else there was to see. The whole visit was conducted in the most natural and normal way one could have expected of an encounter between fellow Americans in such a remote outpost. We stayed altogether only about 45 minutes because we had other places to visit before

...r scheduled pre-sundown return to Georgetown (no landing lights!). The ...ject head thanked us warmly for coming and for our interest in the ..., and we were on our way.

The only other note I might add is that we saw the MS CUDJOE in ...t Kaituma, but we were in a hurry by that time and did not board ...e vessel or meet any of the crew. Nor did we visit the rest house ... Port Kaituma, which was reportedly run by PT women, some of them ...ves of the "pioneer" workers at the site.

I seem to recall getting a letter subsequently from Jim Jones thank-...g me for my visit and hoping we might meet on one of his visits to Guy-...a. For one reason or another that meeting never materialized, nor did ...ave any further contact with the PT people during the rest of my stay ... Guyana.

There were only two aspects of PT activities in Guyana in my time ...ich raised doubt or suspicion in my mind. One was the church's prac-...ce of faith healing, which many of my informants believed to be phony. ...e other was the source of the several million dollars the Church was ...vesting in Guyana and in an area of that country neither notably salu-...ious or endowed with natural resources. However, neither of these ...servations was such as to warrant investigation or intervention by the ...assy. There was no shred of evidence that any of the PT members was ...esent in Guyana except of his or her own volition, and the Embassy's ...ertures of a friendly nature received a more or less normally friendly ...sponse.